Region 6 Stakeholder Needs

This section summarizes information gathered through interviews with more than 60 Region 6 stakeholders concerned with emergency preparedness and homeland security. Interviews were conducted in January and February 2004 with individuals representing a wide range of disciplines and perspectives. Those interviewed represent the public and private sectors; Police and Fire Departments; hospitals; special purpose districts; tribes; elected and appointed officials; and local, State, and Federal agencies.

The information collected during the interviews was then validated and further refined during a stakeholder meeting held on March 5, 2004. The issues presented in this section are organized around themes that arose in the interviews and were reconfirmed during the stakeholder meeting. Many of these themes are similar to the seven strategic themes identified in the Washington Statewide Homeland Security Strategic Plan.

There is some natural overlap between themes, and some needs could logically fit under more than one theme. Accordingly, subtitles in this section respond to State Plan titles whenever feasible and are augmented by other titles deemed worthy of separate reference; in turn, they are grouped under regional Theme headings that were adopted at the March workshop.

Regional Theme I: Coordinated Regional Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

1.1 Strengthening Regional Partnerships, Leadership, and Coordination

Stakeholders asserted that local borders and county lines do not limit natural or man-made disasters. Thus, natural disasters and acts of terrorism usually require a regional response. Accordingly, the jurisdictions within Region 6 recognize the need to strengthen regional partnerships and improve regional emergency coordination. By establishing regional priorities, building strong individual agencies, and creating an effective coordination system, it is believed that the Region will effectively prepare for responding to all types of events. This effort at effective coordination is seen as crossing jurisdictional lines and disciplines and involving tribal, public, private, and volunteer entities.

Regional stakeholders identified the following specific needs related to strengthening regional partnerships and coordination:

1) **Support for a regional Approach.** A commitment to a regional approach is needed from key stakeholders, including the leadership of local jurisdictions, and implies support of a common mission, goals and priorities. Building consensus and committing to a regional approach would facilitate carefully planned investments designed to move the Region closer to the ability to launch an effective, coordinated response to any disaster.

2) **Lower Political and Jurisdictional Barriers.** The political barriers that exist between jurisdictions, special purpose districts and other entities inhibit the Region's ability to achieve a high level of all-hazards preparation.

3) **Understanding of Capabilities, Roles, and Responsibilities.** An assessment of the response and preparedness capabilities of individual agencies (i.e., equipment, personnel and systems) is needed to determine what is missing and what is already in place. Further, stakeholders need clarification of what they should expect of Federal and State agencies and from each other with regards to coordination, planning and preparedness, mitigation, and response. They need a clear understanding of the various roles different agencies would play during an incident, how these agencies should be contacted, and the way in which limited resources would be allocated.

4) **Engage Community and Non-Traditional Partners.** It is important to successfully engage the community and non-traditional partners like hospitals, NGOs, and the private sector in planning and preparedness activities. These partners need education and training on hazards and understanding their responsibilities relative to prevention, preparedness, and response.

5) **Mechanism to Coordinate Planning Activities.** Stakeholders noted that although it is important to have strong planning capabilities and response plans at the individual agency level, there is a need to create an effective way of coordinating planning efforts across jurisdictions.

6) **Regional Approach for Allocating Grant Money.** A regional approach to allocating funds based on agreed upon priorities and funding criteria would direct funds to the activities and expenditures likely to have the greatest impact on regional needs. Funds are needed to support planning at the local and regional levels.

7) **Develop Long-Term Support.** Stakeholders identified the need for widespread, long-term support for prevention, planning, and preparedness from elected officials (present and future), the not-for-profit and private sectors, and citizens of the Region. Without such support, funding for programs is likely to dry up.

1.2 Emergency Response and Recovery

Response personnel and equipment are perhaps the most visible part of disaster preparedness, frequently being the subject of evening news stories and forming the basis of after-action reports and analyses. By contrast, a significant portion of recovery operations occurs behind the scenes, in government offices and in individual homes. Both response and recovery operations are essential for the successful resolution of a disaster, but scarce resources, conflicting response and recovery procedures, and differing priorities often complicate coordination of these two operations.

The Region's stakeholders are well aware of these constraints and expressed the following needs:

1) **Assessment of Capabilities.** The capabilities of each entity (e.g., equipment, personnel, and systems) need to be assessed in order to determine the feasibil-

ity of sharing assets and resources regionally. This determination will also enable the identification of resource shortfalls. Specific resource needs identified included enhanced analytical capability and equipment (i.e., radiological monitoring devices, waterfront threat protection gear, additional detection devices, emergency vehicles, generators and personnel protective gear).

2) **Maintaining Up-to-Date Supplies.** A system for periodically refreshing and updating disaster supplies needs to be implemented. Shipping supplies in from outside the Region may not be the best way to respond to a disaster.

3) **Incident Command System (ICS).** According to interview comments, use of the ICS has been uneven throughout the Region. Stakeholders indicated that ICS is an asset that needs to be better understood and should be implemented and used effectively.

Regional Theme II: Assess and Address Regional Critical Infrastructure and Key Assets, Needs, Threats, and Vulnerabilities

2.1 Reduce Vulnerability

Reducing vulnerability to a disaster is an important strategy for mitigating the impact of an event. Stakeholders identified the following needs related to reducing vulnerability throughout the Region:

1) **Regional Vulnerability Assessment.** The first step is to develop a regional vulnerability assessment, including both public and private sector assets and critical infrastructure. Many local jurisdictions have undertaken their own assessments, which offer key information that can be included in a regional assessment. The assessment should recognize the types of hazards and threats that pose the biggest risk to the Region.

2) **Develop an Approach to Reducing Vulnerability.** Next, a comprehensive program for protecting critical infrastructure should be developed, which addresses the interdependencies of critical infrastructures.

Regional Theme III: Sustainable Funding

3.1 Resource Capacity

Local governments in King County are currently very fiscally constrained. Emergency management staff levels have remained constant or have decreased while demands have increased. Funding sources and requirements are continuously changing with little assurance of long-term sustainable funding. Most emergency response agencies lack the depth of staff to respond to an extended event.

Sufficient resources must be allocated at the regional and local levels to allow agencies to meet the demands placed upon them, particularly with regard to planning. Emergency managers need to find stable regional and local funding sources that

can sustain ongoing programs. The general public, the private and non-for-profit sectors, and elected officials must be frequently informed about the importance of these programs in order to garner support.

Regional stakeholders identified the following specific needs:

1) **Personnel Shortages.** There are serious personnel shortfalls in several critical emergency response areas (e.g., public health). In some cases, current personnel funding is insufficient to provide adequate daily staffing for day-to-day operations, let alone an emergency response. As a Region, most emergency response agencies lack the depth to perform an extended response.

2) **Insufficient Training Resources.** Lack of funding limits the ability of response personnel to attend training.

3) **Long-term Funding.** Emergency management programs need stable, long-term regional and local funding sources. Federal sources of funding are no longer available and are short-term. The business case for emergency management and homeland security programs should be made to garner local and regional support. The general public, the private and non-for-profit sectors, and elected officials must be frequently informed about the importance of these programs in order to foster widespread support.

Regional Theme IV: Continuity of Operations and Critical Services (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG)

4.1 Critical Infrastructure Protection

As discussed in the recent Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-7 on critical infrastructure protection, critical infrastructures are defined as providing essential services whose exploitation or destruction by terrorists could cause catastrophic health effects/mass casualties or whose incapacitation could have a debilitating effect on security and economic well being. Examples of critical infrastructures are drinking water systems, energy (e.g., electricity), transportation, public health, food, and banking and finance. Regional stakeholders identified some of these same infrastructures as being of high concern for the Region. Much of the infrastructure is privately owned, so protecting it requires actions and partnerships between the private sector and public agencies. The process for protection usually involves identifying the critical infrastructure assets, prioritizing those assets through threat and vulnerability analyses and developing/implementing protective action plans. Within this process for protecting the Region's critical infrastructures, Region 6 stakeholders have identified the following priority needs:

1) **Identify Critical Infrastructures.** There is a great need to assess which infrastructures are critical in Region 6 and to determine how best to protect them. This need was identified frequently during stakeholder interviews.

2) **Develop Critical Infrastructure Protection Plan (CIP).** The lack of a CIP was identified as a need throughout the Region.

3) **Develop Backup Systems.** Backup operations are needed, such as 911 system backup, EOC backups, and alternative energy backup generators.

4) **Harden Critical Infrastructure.** Older transportation and building infrastructures are not robust for handling earthquakes and explosions. Water supplies, including wellhead protection, are another area that needs hardening.

5) **Harden Hospital/Public Health Infrastructure.** Public health clinics need to be hardened and prepared to accept overflow from hospitals.

6) **Deterrence/Surveillance.** More deterrence of terrorism and crimes against critical infrastructure is needed. Region 6 needs to be able to respond quickly with trained personnel (e.g., law enforcement) and coordinate enforcement with other jurisdictions to protect critical infrastructures. More surveillance equipment (e.g., cameras) and barriers (e.g., fencing) are needed. All of these assets supplement private security of CIP when there are general or specific threats against critical infrastructure sectors (e.g., U.S. DHS receives a general threat against ports and asks for local/regional support to create a security buffer and provide surveillance around the port for a week.)

7) **Secure Information.** The Region lacks adequate cyber protection and staff expertise to provide such protection.

8) **Coordination with the Private Sector.** More coordination is needed with the private sector that owns critical infrastructure.

4.2 Public Health Response

Public health response in the Region would require a coordinated response by a number of partners, including emergency medical services, public health agencies at various levels of government, hospitals and clinics, laboratories, and associated disciplines impacted by public health issues. Responding to public health emergencies often requires a strong capability to monitor health status to rapidly detect contaminants, diagnose health problems, mobilize community partnerships, develop policy/plans to support public health efforts, enforce laws to protect health and ensure safety, and provide a trained healthcare workforce. Many stakeholders feel public health preparedness is a weak link in the Region's capabilities, particularly in its ability to respond to bioterrorism. The following are identified needs for a regional public health response:

1) **Additional Staff.** Additional public health staff are needed to respond to events and address biological threats, isolation, and quarantine issues. Insufficient funding currently prevents public health staff from getting to the field to diagnose a problem.

2) **"Community-based" Approach.** More planning needs to be done to flesh out a "community-based public health" approach that involves joint planning, training, and exercising.

3) **Trauma Center Backup.** Hospitals need to ensure backup plans are in order in case the Harborview facility is inoperable or inaccessible.

4) **Additional Emergency Room Capacity.** Emergency room capacity has decreased by an estimated 15 percent in recent years.

Regional Theme V: Inter-Agency Communications

5.1 Improve Communication Systems and Procedures

Critical information needs to be effectively transmitted to relevant parties for successful planning and response. Systems and standard operating procedures for sharing information among all parties at all levels need to be standardized regionally. Concern was expressed that insufficient protocols exist for the sharing of sensitive information in particular. Reliable and redundant intra- and inter-agency communications systems and technology is a critical need. Regional stakeholders specifically commented that the following communication system and procedures are needed:

1) **Determination of an Appropriate Regional System.** A regional system that allows organizations and disciplines from different jurisdictions to communicate is needed. The first step is to undertake an assessment of what systems and technology would be most appropriate for the Region.

2) **Separate Voice and Data Frequencies.** During a response, one frequency is not adequate to meet the needs of emergency responders.

3) **Backup Communications System.** A backup system is needed for when the 800 MHz system is not working effectively. The 800 MHz system may be ineffective because there are too many Public Safety Answering Points and the system may not function during a natural disaster.

4) **Standard Operating Procedures for Sharing Sensitive Information.** These procedures are needed to ensure that sensitive information is shared promptly and securely between jurisdictions and across disciplines. Access to timely, accurate, and potentially sensitive information is critical for ensuring that agencies can take adequate steps to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, and respond to threats.

5.2 Prevention of Terrorist Incidents

Although planning and training are critical elements of a regional homeland security strategy, prevention of incidents is equally important. Effective prevention requires accurate and timely information, and proactive intervention. Region 6 stakeholders identified the following issues that should be addressed to facilitate effective prevention:

1) **Clarify the Level of Terrorist Threat.** There is some disagreement among stakeholders regarding the degree of the terrorist threat and likely targets in the Region. Stakeholders would like to develop a better understanding and agreement about the magnitude of the threat.

2) **Conduct Comprehensive Inspections of Sea and Air Cargo.** More comprehensive inspections of sea and air cargo should be performed in order to prevent terrorists from using the ports to their advantage.

Regional Theme VI: Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery – Training and Exercising

6.1 Emergency Preparedness Education/Training

Training is a key element in successful disaster preparedness. Increasing the level of knowledge for all stakeholders on a variety of disaster-related topics is an essential step toward ensuring that responses and preparedness efforts run smoothly. Education and training can, and should, take a variety of forms, including focused classroom learning, hands-on equipment training, and full-scale field exercises involving participants from a variety of regional organizations.

Region 6 stakeholders echoed the continuing need for emergency preparedness education and training at all levels in order to better prepare for and respond to future disasters. The list below summarizes the major needs that were expressed:

1) **Training Topics.** The following subject areas were specifically mentioned as requiring additional training at all levels: public health threats and the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); use of protective gear and newly acquired response equipment; natural disaster preparedness and response; identification of Region-specific threats; the interdependencies of critical infrastructure; continuity of government; the incident command system and unified command (UC) (this was specifically mentioned for hospital staff and lower-level emergency response personnel); and screening, surveillance, and early detection of WMD use.

2) **Routine Training and Exercises.** Stakeholders noted that the level of training and preparedness varies across jurisdictions, special purpose districts, and other organizations. These partners need to routinely conduct training, exercises, and drills together, holding these events at a regional level. Hands-on exercises, or at least tabletop drills, should include public health participants as well as the public and private sectors, non-profits, and volunteer organizations. These exercises are needed to test the current regional response plans, identify gaps and assumptions, and build relationships across jurisdictions and disciplines. Such exercises must be appropriately resourced, creating incentives for agencies to participate.

3) **Maintaining Emergency Response Capability.** Stakeholders identified the need to ensure that emergency response personnel at all levels are involved in ongoing training. This training should be held frequently in order to accommodate staff turnover and to ensure a well-qualified line of leadership succession. Further, it is important to provide training beyond the front line of emergency responders, since during an event they will require back up and relief.

4) **Continuity of Operation and Continuity of Government Plans.** COOP and COG plans, as well as chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive (CBRNE) plans/annexes should be developed for each jurisdiction. The development of these plans should be coordinated at a regional or State level to ensure consistency. In addition, a number of agencies need to complete terrorism annexes.

Regional Theme VII: Public Information, Public Education, and Outreach

7.1 Encouraging Public Information and Outreach

Informing the public of the importance of sustainable emergency management and homeland security programs improves regional preparedness and ensures long-term support. An effective public information system is critical to alerting citizens to an impending emergency, directing and informing them during the emergency, and assisting them during the recovery. During a response, a coordinated regional outreach strategy is needed to ensure the public does not receive conflicting messages. Appendix 2 of the Regional Disaster Plan establishes a "Joint Information System" (JIS) to ensure effective development, coordination and dissemination of emergency public information in the event of natural or technological (human-caused) emergencies or disasters. This part of the Plan was exercised during the second Top Officials exercise (TOPOFF 2). Ongoing drills and exercises are needed to ensure that the JIS will work effectively during an event.

Regional emergency managers acknowledge that although public outreach is one of the most important activities that emergency managers can do, it is also one of the first areas to get cut when funds are scarce. New, low-cost outreach methods must be leveraged, such as working with more community groups (e.g., churches and schools). Region 5 stakeholders identified the need to work with television, radio, and print media representatives effectively and utilize their distribution capabilities to get accurate information out to the public.

The following needs related to public information and outreach were suggested by Region 6 stakeholders:

1) **Encourage and Structure Community Involvement.** Community and non-traditional partners such as the private sector, schools, and non-profit agencies should be actively encouraged to participate in emergency planning and preparedness activities. The private sector and individual citizens may provide valuable assistance during a response if they received appropriate training prior to the emergency and appropriate systems and procedures were in place to coordinate their involvement.

2) **Foster Public Support.** Solid and ongoing support from the general public and elected officials is necessary to ensure the sustainability of emergency management and homeland security programs. Regional emergency managers should actively share the importance of emergency management and homeland security programs.

3) **Design Information and Outreach for the Intended Audience.** Stakeholders involved in public information and outreach programs should consider the demographics of the Region and the intended audience.